

Madagascar Visit Report

20 May 2019

From Monday, April 1, to Friday, April 5, 2019, I joined the four-person Zonta International mission to Madagascar (in partnership with UNICEF USA).

The team consisted of Ute Scholz, a lawyer from Germany, Dr. Tamara Hagen, a cardiologist from the USA, Judith Kautz, Colonel US Air Force (Retired), Sadako Miyake, Cabinet Office Regional Revitalization Evangelist, Japan.

<https://foundation.zonta.org/MadagascarSiteVisit>

In Japan, Madagascar is considered a "Dangerous Area", so the final decision concerning my participation had to wait until February. Travelling from Japan the trip involved multiple transfers and an overnight in Dubai.

On our first day, we flew to the south of the island, where six (Toyota 4WD) jeeps were waiting for us at the airport.

Here we were joined by Rachel Steinberg of UNICEF USA; Emily Brouwer and Justin Hemenway from NYC; Danielle Boutros, John McNear, Toni Ko joined us from the Field Visit Participants (UNICEF California); and Daniel Ziegler, Sophie Achilleas, Abela Miarintsoa Ralaivita from UNICEF Madagascar; and many others. A total of 24 people, including drivers and interpreters, visited each village in the south.

Travel was difficult. Moving through broken roads, along cliffs and broken wooden bridges was sometimes nerve-wracking, although sometimes the problem was no more than the road being blocked by a flock of water buffaloes.

The Jeeps swayed and bumped along from early morning to late at night; lunch was eaten in the car and was literally mostly bread and water. Sanitation was nothing like most of us experience at home. Whether to use the toilets or to wait until the next village..., the conditions were never good physically. The air and sanitary conditions were so bad that I felt a deep sympathy for those who have to endure them. It made me realize how blessed those of us who enjoy a first-world lifestyle truly are.

The facilities and schools supported by UNICEF USA (United Nations) are located in the "protected area" (they were isolated from the outside by high walls). The women and girls who were waiting for us expressed deep appreciation for the education they were receiving. However, we recognized that support for the many people who live outside the protected areas was a future goal.

Patriarchal customs are commonplace in the southern part of Madagascar. Frequently negotiations with UNICEF were challenged by a male elder.

At the meetings, there were protests from prominent men who are not sympathetic to our efforts in support of women. This situation required respect and tact to handle their feelings

I was advised in advance by the African Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that at this time of presidential change, riots and, possibly, terrorism could possibly occur, and that "caution" was necessary. Many men wore t-shirts with pictures of their preferred candidates on them.

At every village we were greeted with traditional dances and singing by the women and girls who live there. Their enthusiasm was deeply moving. In addition, everywhere we went the people were happy to cooperate and gifted us with beautiful smiles for our pictures.

The traditional culture and customs differ between the tribes living in the east, west, and south of Madagascar. Likewise their ways of thinking and their view of life are different. It is very difficult to solve the problem poverty while these differences exist. .

We were able to meet with Mr. Ichiro Ogasawara, Ambassador of Japan in Madagascar who provided valuable local information. I was glad to hear that many Japanese companies are supporting our efforts to improve the lives of those less fortunate too.

Overall, we realized how necessary our continued support is; how our efforts provide hope for a better future help build that future; and how the improved situation will aid the people there to develop a modern society. This underscores how important it is to continue the partnership and support that UNICEF USA and Zonta provide for the education of children in Madagascar. I strongly felt that this a gift we can provide to the next generation.

At the reception on the final day, with Ambassador Michael P. Pelletier of the US Embassy in Madagascar and Michel Saint-Lot, President and Representative Director of Madagascar UNICEF, we received thank yours and intentions of "future support and cooperation".

After the success of the 2018 Zonta International Yokohama Convention this trip has reaffirmed my belief in the ideals of that organization and its goals as well as those of UNICEF.

Sadako Miyake